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background notes

Argentina

United States Department of State
Bureau of Public Affairs

June 1986

Official Name: Argentina

PROFILE

Geography

Area: 2,771,300 sq. km. (1.1 million sq. mi.); about the size of the US east of the Mississippi River. **Cities:** *Capital*—Buenos Aires (metropolitan area pop. 10.5 million). *Other major cities*—Cordoba, Rosario, La Plata, Mendoza. **Terrain:** Varied. **Climate:** Varied, predominantly temperate.

People

Nationality: *Noun and adjective*—Argentine(s). **Population** (1985 est.): 30.6 million. **Annual growth rate** (1985 est.): 1.5%. **Density:** 27.8 per sq. mi. **Ethnic groups:** European 97%, mostly Spanish and Italian. **Religions:** Roman Catholic 92%, Protestant 2%, Jewish 2%, other 4%. **Languages:** Spanish (official), English, Italian, German, French. **Education:** *Years compulsory*—7. *Adult literacy*—94%. **Health:** *Infant mortality rate*—34.1/1,000. *Life expectancy*—70.2 yrs. **Work force:** *Agriculture*—19%. *Industry and commerce*—36%. *Services*—20%. *Transport and communications*—6%. *Other*—19%.

Government

Type: Republic. **Independence:** July 9, 1816. **Constitution:** 1853.

Branches: *Executive*—president, vice president, Cabinet. *Legislative*—bicameral Congress (46-member Senate, 254-member Chamber of Deputies). *Judicial*—Supreme Court.

Subdivisions: 22 provinces, 1 district (federal capital), 1 territory (Tierra del Fuego).

Political parties: Radical Civic Union, Justicialista (Peronist), numerous smaller national and provincial parties. **Suffrage:** Universal.

Flag: Horizontal blue and white bands emblazoned with "Sun of May."

Economy

GDP (1985): $65.4 billion. **Annual growth rate** (1985 est.): -4.4%. **Per capita GDP** (1985 est.): $2,140. **Inflation rate** (1986 government target): 28%.

Natural resources: Fertile plains (Pampas). *Minerals*—lead, zinc, tin, copper, iron, manganese, oil, uranium.

Agriculture (15.8% of GNP, about 75% of exports by value). *Products*—grains, oilseeds, livestock products.

Industry (23% of GNP): *Types*—food processing, motor vehicles, consumer durables, textiles, metallurgy, chemicals.

Trade (1985): *Exports*—$8.4 billion (US 11%): grains, meats, oilseeds. *Imports*—$4.1 billion: machinery, fuel and lubricating oils, iron and steel products, wood and lumber, automotive equipment and parts, chemicals. *Major trading partners*— European Community, USSR, US, Brazil.

Official exchange rate: 1 Austral = US$1.20 (April 7, 1986).

Economic aid received: IBRD $2,158 million (cumulative commitment as of December 31, 1985). *IFC*—$236 million (cumulative commitment as of June 1, 1985). *IDB*—$2,500 million (cumulative commitment as of December 31, 1985). *US*—$137 million (loans and grants, 1946-71). US economic assistance has been phased out.

Membership in International Organizations

UN and some of its specialized and related agencies, Organization of American States, Latin American Integration Association, Nonaligned Movement, Group of 24, Group of 77, Latin American Economic System (SELA), Cartagena Group, Contadora Support Group.

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GEOGRAPHY

Argentina shares land borders with Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay. It is bounded by the Atlantic and the Antarctic Oceans.

Extending 3,705 km. (2,302 mi.) from north to south and with an Atlantic coastline 2,850 km. (1,600 mi.) long, Argentina is the second largest country in the Southern Hemisphere, after Brazil, and the eighth largest in the world. Its topography, as varied as that of the United States, ranges from subtropical lowlands in the north to the towering Andean Mountains in the west and the bleak, windswept Patagonian steppe and Tierra del Fuego in the south. The heartland of Argentina is the rich temperate plains known as the pampas, which fan out for almost 800 kilometers (500 mi.) from Buenos Aires in east-central Argentina. This is some of the richest farmland in the world, producing large quantities of wheat, corn, sorghum, and sunflower seeds and providing year-round pasturage for Argentina's famous cattle industry. Argentina is one of the world's largest exporters of foodstuffs.

PEOPLE

The Argentine nation has been built by the fusion of diverse national and ethnic groups. Waves of European immigrants arrived in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Today, descendants of Italian and Spanish immigrants predominate, but many trace their origins to British and West and East European ancestors. Syrian, Lebanese, and other Middle Eastern immigrants number about 500,000 and are concentrated in urban areas. In recent years, there has been a substantial influx of immigrants from neighboring Latin American countries. The native Indian population, estimated at 50,000, is concentrated in the peripheral provinces of the north, northwest, and south.

The Argentine population has one of the lowest growth rates in Latin America (1.5%). Eighty percent of the population resides in urban areas of over 2,000, with more than one-third of the population residing in the metropolitan Buenos Aires area. The sprawling capital, with more than 10 million inhabitants, serves as the focus for national life. Argentines have enjoyed comparatively high standards of living; half the population considers itself middle class.

Over 90% of Argentines are Roman Catholic. Religious freedom is practiced, although all non-Catholic denominations are required to register with the government. The Protestant community is small but active. Argentina's Jewish community of 300,000–450,000 is concentrated in Buenos Aires.

The Argentine educational system is compulsory for grades 1–7, starting at age 6. The adult literacy rate is 94%—one of the highest in Latin America. Literary and artistic tastes have been largely influenced by Western Europe and more recently by the United States.

A large number of Spanish daily newspapers are published in the greater Buenos Aires area; a dozen community newspapers are published in English, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Polish, Ukrainian, and Yiddish. All the community newspapers are periodicals except the daily English-language *Buenos Aires Herald*. Argentina also has developed an advanced telecommunications system.

HISTORY AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS

What is now Argentina was discovered in 1516 by the Spanish navigator Juan de Solis. A permanent Spanish colony was established on the site of Buenos Aires in 1580. Argentina was further in-

Igazu Falls lies on the Argentine, Paraguayan, and Brazilian borders.

Travel Notes

Customs: US citizens are required to have visas to enter Argentina. No inoculations are required for entry.

Climate and clothing: Climate ranges from the hot, subtropical lowlands of the north to cold and rainy Tierra del Fuego in the south. Buenos Aires' climate is similar to Washington's with less severe winters. Bear in mind that the seasons are reversed. For example, the weather in January in Buenos Aires is like July in Washington.

Health: Competent doctors, dentists, and specialists are available in Buenos Aires. There are no particular health risks in Buenos Aires, and no special precautions need be taken. Tapwater is safe.

Telecommunications: International services are adequate; however, phone calls can meet with delays, because the local telephone network is overburdened. Buenos Aires is two time zones ahead of eastern standard time.

Transportation: Buenos Aires' Ezeiza Airport is serviced by many international carriers, with flights originating in the US, Europe, and other Latin American cities. Buenos Aires has an extensive subway and bus system. Taxis are plentiful. Outside Buenos Aires, travel by train, air, bus, or auto.

tegrated into the Spanish Empire following the establishment of the Vice-Royalty of Rio de la Plata in 1776, and Buenos Aires became a flourishing port.

The formal declaration of independence from Spain was made on July 9, 1816. Gen. Jose de San Martin, who campaigned in Argentina, Chile, and Peru, is the hero of national independence. Following the defeat of the Spaniards, a lengthy conflict was waged between centralist and federalist groups to determine the future structure of the nation. National unity was established and the constitution promulgated in 1853.

In the late 19th century, two forces worked to create the modern Argentine nation: the introduction of modern agricultural techniques and the integration of Argentina into the world economy. This economic revolution was aided by foreign investment, primarily British, in Argentina, in such fields as railroads and ports, and by the influx of European manpower necessary to develop Argentina's resources. Conservative forces dominated Argentine politics until 1916, when their traditional rivals, the Radicals, won control of the government through a democratic election.

In the mid-1930s, new social and political forces emerged in the competition for political power. These included the modern, professional military and the labor movement that emerged from the growing urban working class.

In 1943, a military coup, led by among others Col. Juan Domingo Peron (1897–1974), ousted the constitutional government. Elections in 1946 brought Peron to the presidency. He pursued a dynamic policy aimed at giving an economic and political voice to the working class and greatly expanded the number of unionized workers. In 1947, Peron announced the first 5-Year Plan based on nationalization and industrialization. He presented himself as a friend of labor and assisted in establishing the powerful General Confederation of Labor (CGT). He was aided by his dynamic wife Eva Duarte Peron (1919–52), who helped develop his appeal with labor and women's groups and who helped women obtain the right to vote in 1947. Peron was elected president in 1946, reelected in 1952, ousted by the military in 1955, and went into exile, eventually settling in Spain. In the 1950s and 1960s, the government passed between military and civilian administrations, as each sought to deal with diminished economic growth and continued social and labor demands.

On March 11, 1973, general elections were held for the first time in 10 years. Peron was prevented from running, and his stand-in, Dr. Hector J. Campora, was elected president. The Peronists also commanded a strong majority in both houses of the National Congress, which assumed office on May 25, 1973. Campora resigned in July 1973, paving the way for Raul Lastiri, a Peronist Party loyalist, to assume the presidency and call for new elections. Peron won a decisive victory and returned as president in October 1973 with his third wife Isabel de Peron as vice president.

During this period, extremists on the left and right indulged in terrorism with a frequency that threatened public order. The government resorted to a number of emergency decrees, including the implementation of special executive authority to deal with violence. This allowed the government to imprison persons indefinitely without charge.

On July 1, 1974, Peron died and was succeeded by his wife, the first woman president in the Western Hemisphere. Mrs. Peron's administration was undermined by economic deterioration; Peronist intraparty struggles and growing terrorism from both left and right threatened a breakdown of law and order. As a result, Mrs. Peron was removed from office by a military coup on March 24, 1976. Until December 10, 1983, power was formally exercised by the armed forces through a three-man junta composed of the three service commanders.

The military, through the application of strong measures against terrorists and their sympathizers, silenced armed opposition and restored basic order. The costs were high in terms of lives lost and basic human rights violated. Accounting for those who "disappeared" in this period during the late 1970s and punishing those responsible for such acts remain among Argentina's most controversial and divisive internal political issues.

Serious economic problems, defeat by the British in June 1982 after an unsuccessful Argentine attempt to establish sovereignty over the Falkland/Malvinas Islands, human rights abuses, and charges of growing corruption discredited and discouraged the military. This resulted in a period of gradual transition leading the country toward democratic rule. Previous bans on political parties and other basic political liberties were lifted, and a successful and generally peaceful process for the return to elected government was implemented.

On October 30, 1983, Argentines went to the polls to choose a president, vice president, and 14,000 other national, provincial, and local officials in elections that were acclaimed as fair, open, and honest. Raul Alfonsin, candidate of the Radical Civic Union, was elected president, winning 52% of the popular vote. He began a 6-year term of office on December 10, 1983. In November 1985, a large turnout at the peaceful and honest mid-term elections pointed toward continued public support for a strong and vigorous democratic system. The Radicals won a majority in the Chamber of Deputies, with 130 out of 254 seats. The Peronists won 103 seats, while provincial and minor parties retain the balance. In the 46-seat Senate, the Peronists have slightly more seats than the Radicals—21 to 18—but not a majority. Provincial political parties have the remainder.

The Radical Civic Union-led government has moved to resolve some of the nation's most pressing problems, including accounting for the "disappeared," establishing civilian control of the armed

forces, and consolidating democratic institutions. Seeking to reverse several years of mounting inflation and economic stagnation, a new economic program, the Austral Plan (named after the monetary unit chosen to replace the old peso), was adopted. This economic program includes stringent wage and price controls and seeks to restructure the economy to promote greater growth. In foreign policy, Argentina's civilian government settled a longstanding territorial dispute with Chile over the Beagle Channel and is committed to seeking a diplomatic resolution of the Falklands/Malvinas dispute with Great Britain.

GOVERNMENT

The 1853 Argentine constitution, similar to that of the United States, mandates a separation of powers into executive, legislative, and judicial branches at the national and provincial level. Each province also has its own constitution.

The president and vice president are elected to a 6-year single term and cannot immediately run for reelection. Senators are elected by provincial legislatures (with the exception of the two senators representing Buenos Aires, who are elected directly) for 9-year terms, with one-third standing for reelection every 3 years. Deputies are elected for 4 years, in alternate terms with half up for reelection every 2 years. Cabinet ministers are appointed by the president. Considerable power, including a line item veto power, is granted the president by the constitution.

The Argentine judiciary functions as a separate and independent entity of the government. The apex of the court system is the Supreme Court, whose five judges are appointed by the president with the consent of the Senate. The Supreme Court has the power, first asserted in 1854, to declare legislative acts unconstitutional.

Principal Government Officials

President—Raul **Alfonsin**
Vice President—Victor **Martinez**
President Pro Tempore of the Senate—Edison **Otero**
Speaker of the Lower House (Chamber of Deputies)—Juan Carlos **Pugliese**
Chief Justice of the Supreme Court—Jose **Severo Caballero**

Ministers
Interior—Antonio **Troccoli**
Foreign Relations and Worship—Dante **Caputo**
National Defense—Jose **Jaunarena**
Economy—Juan **Sourrouille**

The Plaza de Mayo and May Pyramid commemorate May 25, Argentina's national holiday.

The Oblisk stands in the middle of 9 de Julio Avenue.

Education and Justice—Carlos **Alconada Aramburu**
Labor and Social Security—Hugo **Barrionuevo**
Health and Social Action—Conrado **Storani**

Ambassador to the United States—Enrique **Candioti**

Argentina maintains an embassy in the United States at 1600 New Hampshire Ave. NW., Washington, D.C. 20009 (tel. 202-939-6400). Argentina has consulates general in Houston, Miami, New York, New Orleans, Puerto Rico, San Francisco, and San Juan, and consulates in Baltimore, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

ECONOMY

Argentina has impressive human and natural resources, but political conflict and uneven economic performance since World War II have impeded full realization of its considerable potential. Nonetheless, it remains one of the wealthiest countries in Latin America.

Among the reasons for the military coup of March 1976 was the deteriorating economy, caused by declining production and rampant inflation. Under the leadership of Minister of the Economy Martinez de Hoz, the military government set out to tackle those immediate problems and, in 1978, embarked on a new development strategy centering on the establishment of a free market economy. The strategy also featured the removal or reduction of restrictions in the manufacturing sector and financial markets as well as the search for foreign and domestic investment. Despite those efforts, by late 1980 Argentina entered a period of recession with declines in production and real wages. The economy did not noticeably improve in the early 1980s, and per capita GNP fell at an annual rate of 3.2% between 1980–1985.

Faced with healing a scarred society, the Alfonsin government was slow to tackle the root causes of the economic problems when it took office in December 1983. By mid-1985, however, the country was suffering from an annual inflation rate of over 1,000%. To control inflation and set the country on a prudent fiscal base, which could lay the groundwork for future economic advances, the government introduced a new economic plan in June 1985. The Austral Plan has successfully capped inflation by introducing wage and price

controls. Authorities have set a 1986 target of 28% for inflation. The nation's troublesome external debt is about $50 billion. Good farmland is Argentina's richest natural resource, and the crops and livestock of the fertile pampas have long provided the country with abundant food for domestic consumption, in addition to usually plentiful exports.

Agricultural products constitute a major source of foreign exchange earnings. Grains (principally wheat, corn, soya, sorghum, and oilseeds—mainly soybeans and sunflowers) are major export items. In a good year, grains and oilseed harvests can total some 40 million metric tons. The cattle industry with an estimated 50 million animals, provides for domestic consumption and export markets.

Argentina sells its export crops to a variety of worldwide buyers. The Soviet Union has in recent years emerged as the major purchaser of grains, while China and Iran are also important markets. Argentina also exports agricultural goods to the European Common Market and to the United States, which purchases primarily canned, precooked, and frozen meats.

Argentina obtains about 18% of its imports from the United States. Total imports in 1985 were $4.1 billion, of which $740 million were from the United States. Although many previous sales included consumer goods, in the more austere current environment most purchases for U.S. goods are for capital equipment and raw materials. In 1985, Argentina exported $8.4 billion worth of goods and services, of which $920 million (11%) went to the United States.

Argentina is a net energy exporter. It also has a large electrical production capacity. An important new power project under construction is the joint Argentine–Paraguayan Yacyreta hydroelectric project (2,400 megawatts). Argentina has the most advanced nuclear program in Latin America. With two nuclear-power plants built and another under construction, nuclear power will provide some 9% of the country's energy needs in the near future. Argentina is becoming an important exporter of nuclear technology and assistance.

Further Information

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FOREIGN RELATIONS

Argentina pursues a pragmatic, ideologically pluralistic foreign policy, maintaining relations with almost all countries. Maintaining political sovereignty and economic independence are major priorities. Relations traditionally have been closest with Western Europe, the United States, and Latin American neighbors. More recently, however, the pursuit of trade and other economic advantages has encouraged contacts with nontraditional partners, including communist nations.

Having settled its Beagle Channel dispute with Chile in 1984-85, Argentina currently has only one active territorial dispute, which is with the United Kingdom over a group of islands some 480 miles northeast of Cape Horn. The Argentines refer to the islands as "the Malvinas Islands"; the British refer to them as "the Falkland Islands." Competing claims to sovereignty over them were made by the European powers, notably Britain and Spain. In the early 1800s, Spanish and then Argentine authorities administered the islands. In January 1833, however, Britain reasserted its sovereignty claim, and the islands first became a Crown Colony and later a self-governing dependency. In an effort to establish its sovereignty claim, Argentine military forces occupied the islands on April 2, 1982. Following a brief but costly war, the Argentine forces were defeated. Subse-

quently, Argentina continues to press its claim to sovereignty in a variety of international forums. The United States has taken no legal position on the merits of the competing claims.

U.S.-ARGENTINE RELATIONS

The United States and Argentina have maintained diplomatic relations since 1823. Both countries have sought to maintain a harmonious, constructive relationship based on reciprocal respect and understanding.

In the 1970s, U.S.-Argentine relations entered a difficult period. The United States, concerned about serious human rights violations by the Argentine military government stemming from the campaign against terrorism, moved to restrict both military assistance and the sales of military and other controlled-export items to Argentina. Congressional prohibitions were placed on both military sales and assistance. Argentina consistently maintained that these actions were attempts to influence domestic politics. These legal prohibitions were removed upon the inauguration of the democratically elected government of President Alfonsin in December 1983. In the early 1980s, better relations seemed possible as Argentina demonstrated some improvements in human rights. The Falklands/Malvinas War, however, placed additional strains on bilateral relations. The U.S. position on the nonuse of force for the resolution of disputes led the United States to impose new sanctions on Argentina and to provide limited assistance to the United Kingdom in its campaign to reoccupy the Falklands.

In the aftermath of the Falklands/Malvinas War, new efforts were made to normalize relations. Sanctions imposed during the fighting were lifted, and the United States supported Argentine-sponsored UN resolutions on the Falklands/Malvinas.

Following the military's mid-1982 decision to return the country to democracy, the human rights situation and political climate improved dramatically. During 1983, all remaining political prisoners being held without trial under state-of-siege powers were released. Also in 1983, the 9-year-old state of siege was lifted, and restrictions on trade union activities and press censorship virtually ceased.

Since Alfonsin's victory in 1983, Argentine-U.S. relations, based on a shared base of democratic values, have warmed, and President Alfonsin made a state visit to the United States in March 1985, the first such visit by an Argentine President in 24 years. Argentina maintains its independent stance in world affairs but cooperates with the United States in resolving bilateral differences in a spirit of hemispheric cooperation.

Because of Argentina's relatively advanced economy, the United States phased out its bilateral economic assistance program in 1971. While in existence, the Agency for International Development and its predecessor agencies authorized development loans and grants to finance such projects as road building, housing, feasibility studies, and agriculture. There are no Peace Corps volunteers in Argentina.

Numerous U.S. industrial firms and banks maintain subsidiaries in Argentina. Licensing agreements with local companies are common. U.S. private investment totals more than $3.1 billion, primarily in manufacturing, chemicals, agricultural manufacturing, transportation equipment, and banking. Several thousand U.S. citizens reside in Argentina.

Principal U.S. Officials

Ambassador—Frank V. Ortiz
Deputy Chief of Mission—John A. Bushnell
Counselor for Public Affairs—Serban Vallimarescu
Counselor for Administrative Affairs—Joseph Machado
Counselor for Political Affairs—Richard B. Howard
Counselor for Economic Affairs—Andrew Sens
Counselor for Commercial Affairs—Richard Rueda, Jr.
Counselor for Consular Affairs—Raymond M. Bailey
Counselor for Scientific and Technological Affairs—William S. Tilney
Defense Attache and Air Attache—Col. Charles N. Nielsen, USAF
Military Group—Col. Emmette W. Smith, Army
Agricultural Attache—Dawson Ahalt

The U.S. Embassy in Argentina is located at 4300 Colombia, Buenos Aires 1425. The APO address for the Embassy is APO Miami 34034, (tel. 774-7611; 774-8811; 774-9911). ■

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